



Questions and responses in †Ākhoe Hai||om

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines †Ākhoe Hai||om, a Khoe language of the Khoisan family spoken in Northern Namibia. I document the way questions are posed in natural conversation, the actions the questions are used for and the manner in which they are responded to.

I show that in this language speakers rely most heavily on content questions. I also find that speakers of †Ākhoe Hai||om address fewer questions to a specific individual than would be expected from prior research on Indo European languages. Finally, I discuss some possible explanations for these findings.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines †Ākhoe Hai||om, a Khoe language of the Khoisan family spoken in Northern Namibia. Previous linguistic work on the language consists of two short grammars (Heikkinen, n.d.; Widlok, forthcoming). Recent linguistic work has focused on the specialized issues of spatial reference (Neumann and Widlok, 1996; Widlok, 1999, 2008), specific verbal constructions (Rapold, forthcoming), reciprocals (Widlok et al., 2008) and tone (Rapold and Widlok, 2008). †Ākhoe Hai||om is very closely related to the language Khoekhoegowab. More grammatical work has been done on this language than on †Ākhoe Hai||om (Haacke, 1976, 1978, 1988). The current paper is based on that work as well as on the †Ākhoe Hai||om sketch grammars and my own elicitation. The topic of questions has so far remained untreated in these two language varieties. Moreover, this paper differs from previous work because the data that was used consists of video recordings of natural conversation and as such, it is possible to describe the questioning strategies as they are actually used in day-to-day interaction by current speakers of the language. This paper deals with question formation (polar questions, content questions and alternative questions) and the responses to them. The last section describes and explains some of the differences found in a cross-linguistic comparison of question response sequences with nine other languages.

This paper is part of the Max-Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics' Multimodal Interaction group's Question and Response Project (see Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson, this volume). In this project, questions and their responses across ten languages were collected and coded for a number of features (see Stivers and Enfield, this volume, for the coding scheme). For all these languages, a minimum of 350 questions and their responses were collected from video recordings of natural conversations, and these were all coded. The features that the question response sequences were coded for, and from which the following results come, were chosen because prior research in the field of Social Interaction has shown them to be important in natural conversation. Using the techniques of Conversation Analysis (CA) natural conversation has been shown

Abbreviations: 1, 1st person; 2, 2nd person; 3, 3rd person; A, final –a on nouns; APPL, applicative; CONJ, conjunction; d, dual; DECL, declarative; DEM, demonstrative; f, feminine; FUT, future; IMP, imperative; m, masculine; n, neuter; OBJ, object pronoun; p, plural; PAS, passive; PST, past; POT, potential; PROG, progressive; Q, question particle; RECPST, recent past; s, singular; STAT, stative; UNKN, unknown meaning.

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to be systematic (e.g. Sacks et al., 1974). Conversations are based on sequences of turns by the speakers. The speakers' turn-taking is systematic, based on rules (these are not prescriptive rules), predictable, and speakers themselves orient to this. They invoke these rules if they are violated, e.g.: "Answer my question!" Additionally this systematicity is claimed to be universal (Schegloff, 2006; Stivers et al., 2009).

The data I used I collected between 2004 and 2007 for the DoBeS language corpus. The DoBeS language corpus is an online corpus that consists of video recordings of endangered speech communities. It is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and is accessible at www.mpi.nl/DOBES. The question response sequences used for this project come from seven conversations comprising 94 min of video-recorded conversation containing 408 questions. Three of these conversations (comprising 28 min and containing 133 questions) were task based in that the participants, who knew each other, were given a picture book ("The frog story" (Mayer, 1994)) or shown video clips (the MPI "staged events" task clips (van Staden et al., 2001)) together and were asked to talk about that. For the frequency analyses, this task-based data was excluded because the nature of the task influenced the kind of the questions being asked. Most questions were content questions of the "What is s/he doing?" and "What is that?" kind. Also in these conversations, a lot more questions were being asked than in the non-task based conversations presumably because the subjects were confronted with something unknown. The task-based data was drawn on for the grammatical description of question formation in †Ákhoe Haillom and when dealing with structural issues in conversation. The non-task based data used comes from four natural, multiparty conversations comprising 66 min of video recording. They include 29 participants, 15 women and 14 men ranging from 6 to over 60 years of age.

2. The language

†Ákhoe Haillom is a Khoisan language. †Ákhoe has 49 phonemes of which 20 are clicks. The language has free word order but the dominant word order is SOV. In keeping with the typological profile of SOV languages, adjectives, demonstratives and numerals generally precede nouns, and the language has postpositions. Nouns are marked by person-gender-number markers. Adjectives, demonstratives, interrogatives and numerals all agree with their head noun. Tense, aspect and mood are marked by particles instead of bound morphemes.

†Ákhoe Haillom has three basic sentence types: declarative, imperative and interrogative. The declarative and imperative are usually marked by a mood particle whereas the interrogative cannot take these particles. The following examples were elicited; they do not come from the questions data. The declarative is marked by the declarative marker *ge*.¹ This sentence type marker usually occurs in the second position in a clause as in example (1).

- (1) *Vanesa-s ge ra tai.*²
 Vanesa-3sf DECL PROG suckle
 'Vanesa is suckling.' (Farm60701p.3)³

Examples (16), (24), (30), (31) and (32) later on in the article, show that this position is not obligatory.

The imperative is marked by the imperative marker *re* which occurs after the verb.

- (2) *Oa re om-s kha.*
 return IMP home-3sf to
 'Go home.' (Tsumeb0702p.20)

The interrogative is 'marked' by the absence of both the declarative marker *ge* and the imperative *re*.

- (3) *Uri ra |gôa-e?*
 jump PROG child-3sn.A
 'Does the child jump?' (Tsumeb0702p.17)

The distinction "declarative with *ge*" "interrogative without *ge*" is not quite as clear-cut as I have presented it here. The declarative marker is a modality marker. It does not mark all declaratives, it only marks non-embedded declaratives, but unlike other modality markers it does not occur in interrogatives (Haacke, 1976), with one explainable exception (see section 3.2.3).

Interrogativity can also be marked with intonation but I will not be dealing with this here since intonation can be used to convey syntactic, semantic and discourse information and also speech acts, sentence types and speaker attitude (see

¹ The declarative marker *ge* is tonally distinct from the recent past marker *ge*. Tone is not marked in the orthography though.

² I use the standard Khoekhoegowab orthography in which long vowels are indicated by a horizontal line above the vowel (*û*), and nasalized vowels are marked by a circumflex (*û*).

³ The code in brackets after the examples refers to the source of the example sentence. If the code starts with H and is followed by 6 numbers, the example was taken from the data used in the questions project. The other codes refer to either the video session names followed, after the colon, by the speaker's acronym, or they refer to the notebook from which the elicited example was taken. The video sessions are in the DoBeS archive: <http://www.mpi.nl/DOBES>.

Table 1
Distribution of questions by question type.

Question type	%	<i>n</i>
Polar	41.5	95
Content	58.5	134
Alternative	0	0
Total	100	229

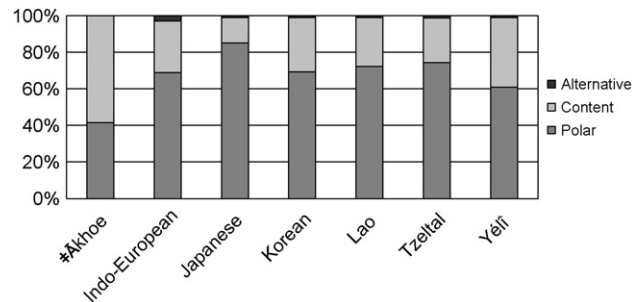


Fig. 1. Distribution of question types, showing #Akhoe Haillom as the only language in the comparison in which content questions form the majority.

Hirschberg, 2004 for an overview). It is difficult to filter out what the “pure” question intonation of any single utterance in natural conversation is, if there is one. Another major difficulty with intonation in my data is due to the fact that the cultural setting for conversations is outdoors, which contributes a lot of background noise (radios, whistling, children crying) and multiple speakers.

Marking an utterance as an interrogative by leaving out the declarative marker is typologically unusual. Dryer (2008) in WALs (the World Atlas of Language Structures) mentions only four languages of a sample of 842 languages that form interrogatives in this way.

3. Question design

In #Akhoe Haillom, questions can be posed in the form of content questions, polar questions or alternative questions.⁴ Alternative questions are by far the rarest type, there are four alternative questions in my data sample and two of those are through-produced questions. Through-produced questions are two questions that are produced as one utterance without a pause between them and as one intonational unit. The other two alternative questions occur in the experimental data and therefore do not figure in Table 1. Approximately two thirds of all questions that occur in natural conversation are content questions and the remaining one third are polar questions. Most languages in this project show the inverse distribution, they have a majority of polar questions (see Fig. 1 in section 5).

3.1. Content questions

Content questions make up 58.5% of all questions asked in the natural conversation in this data collection. The main strategy to form content questions in #Akhoe Haillom is the use of question words in conjunction with dropping the declarative marker *ge*. In #Akhoe Haillom, question words usually come in the first position in the phrase. The first position can be the focus position (Witzlack-Makarevich, 2006). If another element in the phrase is in the first position, the question word comes directly after it. Compare elicited example (4) with example (5) which comes from the conversational data. In (4) the question word *tae* ‘what’ comes in first position and in (5) the question word comes after the NP ‘this walking thing’, which is in the focus position.

- (4) *Tae-e nē e?*
 what-3SN.A DEM 3sn.A
 ‘What is this?’ (Tsumeb0701p.34)

⁴ Since this article is part of a series of similar articles published in a special issue it was agreed to use the terms polar, content and alternative questions across all the articles. Polar questions are also referred to as propositional questions or yes/no questions. These questions make a confirmation or disconfirmation relevant. Content questions, also known as question word questions, contain a question word. Alternative questions are questions that give the addressee a choice of usually two possibilities for an answer.

Table 2
Distribution of most common question words.

Category	Question word	Translation	%	n
Person	<i>tai (tari)</i>	'who'	14	20
	<i>ham</i>	'who'	8.4	12
Thing	<i>tae (tare)</i>	'what'	28	40
Reason	<i>tae kōse</i>	'why'	0.7	1
Selection	<i>mā</i>	'which'	17.5	25
Place	<i>māba</i>	'where'	12.6	18
Manner	<i>māti</i>	'how'	12.6	18
Quantity	<i>mātiko</i>	'how many'	1.4	2
Time	<i>mā llae</i>	'what time'	4.2	6
Time	<i>hāna</i>	'when'	0.7	1
Total			100	143 ^a

^a There is a discrepancy between the total number of question words in this table: 143, and the total number of content questions in Table 1: 134. This is because the experimental data is not included in Table 1 but it is included in this table.

- (5) *Nē-s-a !gū-xū-s-a tae-s-a?*
DEM-3sf-A walk-thing-3sf-A what-3sf-A
'What is this walking thing?' (H001108) (FS_Sa_Ei:EI)

I use Cysouw's (2004) typological classification of question words to categorise the question words in ꞤĂkhoe Haiłom. Cysouw's main categories are Person (who), Thing (what), Place (where), Selection (which), Quantity (how much), Manner (how) and Time (when). ꞤĂkhoe Haiłom has question words for the main categories Person, Thing and Selection. The question words for the categories Quantity, Time and Manner are derived from the question word for Selection.

The distribution of the most common question words used in ꞤĂkhoe Haiłom is shown in Table 2.

3.1.1. Person

There are two question words for Person; *tai* and *ham*. *Tai* is a contraction of the form *tari*. In the following elicited examples, the first example sentence uses the long question word *tari* which carries a PGN (person gender number) marker for 3rd person female and it occurs in phrase initial position.

- (6) *Tari-s-a llnā Ꞥnôa-s-a?*
who-3sf-A DEM sit-3sf-A
'Who (female) sits over there?' (Tsumeb0701p.10)

The next example shows the less frequent question word *ham*, which is also used for 'who', with a PGN marker for 3rd person neuter.

- (7) *Ham-i go hau kara-e?*
Q-3sn RECPST bring bead-3sn.A
'Who brought the beads?' (H002412) (Ga_beads2:EN)

Further research is needed to explore the difference between the question words *ta(r)i* and *ham*.

3.1.2. Thing

The question word for the category Thing, *tare*, can be contracted to *tae*. It usually occurs clause initially. The elicited examples show a declarative (8a) followed by a question (8b) with a fronted question word.

- (8a) *Nē-b ge ari-b-a.*
DEM-3sm DECL dog-3sm-A
'This is a dog.'
- (8b) *Tae-e nē?*
what-3sn.A DEM
'What is this?' (Tsumeb0701p.10)

The question word *tae*, usually used for asking about objects and events, can also be used to ask for reasons despite there being a designated question word for “why” questions *tae kōse*. Twelve of the 40 cases in this data sample were questions that asked for a reason as in example (9).

- (9) *O !nā-b-a xū tae-si †gae tama hâ?*
 CONJ DEM-3sm-A from Q-2sfobj smoke NEG PERF
 ‘And why don’t you smoke over there?’ (H002227) (Ga_beads2:AR)

Vossen (1997) reconstructs the question word for who in Proto-Khoekhoe as **da*, in †Ākxhoe this corresponds to the *ta-* part of *tari* ‘who’ and *tare* ‘what’. Vossen suspects that the *-re* and *-ri* suffixes are related to an interrogative particle that is added at the end of an interrogative in the non-Khoekhoe languages, for example Kxoe (Köhler, 1981).

3.1.3. Selection

The question word for Selection is *mâ*. As with the previous question words, it occurs in clause initial position, as shown with these elicited examples.

- (10a) *Nau khau-khoe-s i a se-e go mâ s-a.*
 DEM big-person-3sf UNKN STAT 1p-A RECPST see 3sf-A
 ‘That woman we saw.’ (Tsumeb0701p.35)
- (10b) *Mâ khau-khoe-s-a?*
 Q big-person-3sf-A
 ‘What/which woman?’ (Tsumeb0701p.35)

The selection question word *mâ* can be used to ask questions concerning the selection between people, things and places. Of the 25 cases in this data collection, 15 cases ask about places, and five each ask about people and things.

The specific question words for Place, Manner, Quantity and Time are derived from the question word *mâ* for Selection. All the following examples for these question words are elicited.

3.1.4. Place

The question word for Place is *mâba*, which can be glossed as either ‘which place’ or ‘where’.

- (11a) *Ari-b ge dao-b !nâ ra !gû.*
 dog-3sm DECL road-3sm in PROG walk
 ‘The dog walks in the road.’ (Tsumeb0702p.8)
- (11b) *Mâba ra !gû ari-b-a?*
 where PROG walk dog-3sm-A
 ‘Where does the dog walk?’ (Tsumeb0702p.8)

3.1.5. Manner

The question word for Manner, glossed as ‘how’, is *mâti*.

- (12a) *Ari-b ge !aise ra !gû.*
 dog-3sm DECL fast PROG walk
 ‘The dog walks fast.’ (Tsumeb0702p.9)
- (12b) *Mâti ra !gû ari-b-a?*
 how PROG walk dog-3sm-A
 ‘How does the dog walk?’ (Tsumeb0702p.9)

3.1.6. Quantity

The question word for Quantity ‘how many’ is *mâtiko*.

- (13) *Mâtiko-te ta !gae †nôa.*
 how.many-3pf.A 1s tie sit
 ‘How many did I sit and tie?’ (Ga_beads_2: Ap)

3.1.7. Time

The question word for Time ('what time' or 'when') is *mâ* *||aeb*. Literally, it is 'which time'; *mâ* being the question word for Selection and *||aeb* meaning 'time'.

(14a) *Ari-b ge nētse ra uri.*
 dog-3sm DECL today PROG jump
 'The dog jumps today.' (Tsumeb0702p.9)

(14b) *Mâ ||ae-b-a uri ari-b-a?*
 Q time-3sm-A jump dog-3sm-A
 'When does the dog jump?' (Tsumeb0702p.9)

Another way of asking about time is using the phrase *mâ ||aeb ai* 'at which time'.

(15) *Mâ ||ae-b ai-s mama-s-a †û-e |gôa-s-a nî sâi-ba?*
 Q time-3sm to/at-3sf mother-3sf-A food-3sn.A child-3sf-A FUT cook-APPL
 'When will mother cook food for the child?' (Tsumeb0702p.9)

The conversational data contains one occurrence of the question word *hâna* for 'when'.

To sum up, †Ăkhoe Hailom relies more heavily on content questions than other languages in this volume. Moreover, it has a reasonably large number of question words that usually occur in clause initial position. The most commonly used question words in conversation in the present corpus are *ta(r)e* 'what', *ta(r)i* 'who' and *mâ* 'which'.

3.2. Polar questions

Polar questions make up 41.5% of all questions asked in natural conversation in the present corpus. Content questions are signalled by both the absence of the declarative marker as well as by the presence of a question word. In contrast to this, polar questions can be signalled by the absence of the declarative marker alone. Compare the elicited example sentences (16), a declarative, and (17), a question.

(16) *|Hao-û bi ta ge go.*
 meet.with 3smobj 1s DECL RECPT
 'I met with him.' (Tsumeb0701p.48)

(17) *|Hao-û bi i-s?*
 meet.with 3smobj STAT-2sf
 'Did you meet with him?' (Tsumeb0701p.48)

Apart from the main difference being the presence (in (16)) versus the absence (in (17)) of the declarative marker *ge*, there is a difference in the pronouns: 1st person singular *ta* in sentence (16) and 2nd person singular feminine marker *-s* in (17). In addition, the past tense particle *go*, which is present in (16), is absent in (17) where the stative particle *i* reflects the tense.

3.2.1. Sentence final marking

Polar questions can have a sentence final question particle as a marker although this is not frequent in conversation. Of 128 polar questions, including the experimental data, only 9% ($n = 12$) are marked with a sentence final marker. †Ăkhoe Hailom has two sentence final question markers: *kha* and *o*, and a number of words that can function as sentence final question markers: *bo* 'or' and the loan from Afrikaans of 'or', *ama-e* 'true' or 'truth' and *hina* 'right'. The last two are rare.

3.2.2. Question particles *kha* and *o*

The question particles *kha* and *o* have a different distribution from the other sentence final markers mentioned in section 3.2.1. *kha* and *o* occur at the end of a noun phrase that in itself forms the whole question utterance. Compare the elicited example (18) with (19).

(18) *Khau-khoe-s-a kha?*
 big-person-3sf-A Q
 'Is this the woman?' (Tsumeb0702p.13)

- (19) *O llnā goaro-b som-s-a kha?*
 CONJ DEM marula.tree-3sm shade-3sf-A Q
 ‘What about that marula tree’s shade?’ (Handcraft_3:YB)

O occurs in the same places as *kha*, after an NP:

- (20) *Khoe-s-a o?*
 person-3sf-A Q
 ‘The woman?’ (‘where is the woman?’ ‘what woman?’) etc. (Farm608p.4)

Kha also occurs in content questions after the question word, as long as the question word is marked with a PGN marker. *O* cannot occur in this position.

- (21) *Tai-s-a kha?*
 who-3sf-A Q
 ‘Who is she?’ (H002207) (Ga_beads2:Ga)

The six examples of this type of question particle in this data sample look very much like question particles that have elsewhere been called topic-only question markers (Ameka, 1998; Comrie, 1984).⁵ These question particles mark the topic about which the speaker wants information and they occur in questions that do not contain a verb. Once more occurrences of this question particle are gathered this can be looked at in more detail.

3.2.3. Sentence final markers

The other sentence final markers are words that, aside from their normal function (for example conjunctions), can be used to form a polar question. The words *bo* ‘or’ and *of* ‘or’ can be used as sentence final markers in polar questions. They are distinct from *kha* because they can occur at the end of all noun phrases as well as after verb phrases. Compare example (22) where *bo* occurs after an NP with the example (23) where *bo* occurs after a VP.

- (22) *Kiba-b-a bo?*
 goalkeeper-3sm-A or
 ‘Is he the goalkeeper or?’ (SE_WI_TV:WI)

- (23) *Sisen !gû-b goro bo?*
 work go-3sm RECPST or
 ‘Did he go to work or?’ (Ga_beads2:Ga)

Note the lack of the declarative marker *ge* in both (22) and (23). If (22) for example had been a statement with an added disjunctive marker ‘he is the goalkeeper or?’ it would have been *kibab ge bo?* The words *bo* ‘or’, *of* ‘or’, *ama-e* ‘true’ and *hina* ‘right’ can also be used as sentence final question markers at the end of declarative sentences to form polar tag questions. These questions are the only ones that do have a declarative marker *ge*; they consist of a declarative followed by a sentence final question marker. In this way they function like English tag questions.

- (24) *Nē hū-de hūga nēti di ge mâ-e bo?*
 DEM thing-3pf:A long like.this 3pf DECL stand-UNKN or
 ‘These things were standing long like this or?’ (LEGO_Fr_NO:Fr)

- (25) *O-b ge a xū-ru gara ama-e?*
 CONJ-3sm DECL STAT thing-UNKN big true-3sn.A
 ‘And he is a big thing, true?’ (Gas_yardA:Ga)

One could argue that these utterances are declarative statements that, because of a lack of uptake from the conversational partners, are then extended with a tag and that thus only the tag is the question. However, these utterances are “through-produced”. That is, they are produced as one utterance with no pause in between the declarative and the tag. For this reason, I regard the complete utterances as questions.

In the data sample, there are 128 polar questions. Of these 91% ($n = 116$) are marked only by the absence of the declarative marker, 8% ($n = 10$) have the question particles *kha* or *bo*, and less than 2% ($n = 2$) are declarative sentences with a tag *ama-e*

⁵ I would like to thank a reviewer for pointing this out to me.

and *hina*. Thus, the absence of the declarative marker is by far the most used strategy to form polar questions in this language despite the fact that it might seem to be a disadvantage to have no overt way of marking a question and making it clearly recognisable as such.

3.3. Alternative questions

Alternative questions are the rarest type of question in Ṡákhoe Haillom. In the data sample, four of the questions were of this type. Alternative questions can be formed using the phrase *tama(s) ga/ka io* or using *bo* 'or' or *of* 'or'. *Tama(s) ga/ka io* is a conjunction which literally means '(it) possibly not being so', *tama* being the negative, *ga/ka* being the potential, *o* being 'if' or 'when' and *i* being a stative. The following three elicited examples show the three possible ways of forming alternative questions.

tama(s) ga/ka io

- (26) Uri ra ari-b-a tama-s ga i-o !gû ra ari-b-a?
 jump PROG dog-3sm-A NEG-3sf POT STAT-if walk PROG dog-3sm-A
 'Does the dog jump or does the dog walk?' (Tsumeb0702p.10)

bo

- (27) !Gû ra ari-b-a bo uri ra ari-b-a?
 walk PROG dog-3sm-A OR jump PROG dog-3sm-A
 'Does the dog walk or does the dog jump?' (Tsumeb0702p.11)

of

- (28) Ari-b of katsi-s-a ra !gû?
 dog-3sm OR cat-3sf-A PROG walk
 'Does the dog or the cat walk?' (Farm60801p.9)

While the phrase *tama(s) ga/ka io* tends to be the first one that informants provide when asked to translate alternative questions, it is not at all frequent in natural conversation. In many hours of recorded conversational data I did not find a single example where this phrase was used in a question whereas examples for *bo* being used to form alternative questions occur more frequently.

4. Responses

Questions can have different functions and dependent on their function they may or may not require a response. Rhetorical questions for example do not require a response. In this data collection, I only have questions that make a response relevant. Even though they make a response relevant this does not necessarily mean that their function is to request information. Questions can have other functions and for a discussion of these see section 5.

When asking a question you can select the person you want to answer it, the next speaker, by, for example, using an address term or looking at the person you want to give the answer (Lerner, 2003; Sacks et al., 1974). Looking only at the multi party data where address can be assessed (since it is not necessary to select the next speaker in dyads), of 229 questions 56% ($n = 128$) select a next speaker, 18% ($n = 41$) do not select a next speaker. In 60 cases, (26%) it could not be assessed whether a next speaker was selected by eye gaze.⁶ Even if in all these cases a next speaker were selected, bringing the total of next speaker selection to 81%, this would put Ṡákhoe at the lowest end of the scale of next speaker selection for all the languages in the data set of the Questions Project, lower than Lao with 84%. The highest amount of next speaker selection occurs in Japanese where 99% of questions select a next speaker (see others this volume).

A next speaker can be selected using eye gaze, address terms or by addressing that person's domain of epistemic authority. With the latter, I mean questions that concern the addressee's domain of expertise. For example, the question in (29) concerns knowledge only the addressees would have.

- (29) Fraitax-tsê-s-a tae-b-a-n ta hî-e?
 Friday-day-3sf-A what-3sm-A-3pn PROG do-UNKN
 'What are you doing on Friday?' (H002218) (Ga_beads_2:Ga)

A next speaker can also be selected with a combination of these options. Eye gaze is used most often to select a next speaker. In the 84 question response sequences that selected a next speaker and where eye gaze could be assessed clearly, 63%

⁶ Due to typical seating patterns of speakers (e.g. very far apart, in groups with some backs to the camera) and only one camera, a number of cases cannot be assessed for next speaker selection.

Table 3
Distribution of response types.

Response type	%	<i>n</i>
Answer	60	193
Non-answer	16.8	54
No response	23.2	75
Total	100	322 ^a

^a This is the total amount of questions, including experimental data, for which response could be assessed.

(*n* = 53) of the questioners selected the next speaker using gaze. For address terms and domain of authority, in a total of 126 question response sequences in which a next speaker was clearly selected, address terms were used in 18% (*n* = 23) of the cases and 15% (*n* = 19) of the cases relied on speaker selection through the addressee's domain of authority.

Responses to questions consist of answers and non-answers. Non-answer responses are responses that orient to the fact that a question has been asked but that do not actually give an answer to the question. Examples of non-answer responses would be "I don't know." or laughter. Overall, almost 77% of all questions are responded to but only 60% of questions are actually answered (Table 3).

23% of questions get no response whatsoever. The number of questions that get no response is slightly high in †Ākhoe compared to other languages, most have less than 20% (see others in this volume), but Lao, for instance, is even higher (see Enfield this volume). Still, the fact that speakers select a next speaker less often in †Ākhoe may be related to the slightly elevated amount of questions that remain unanswered. A relatively high proportion of questions that do not select a next speaker receive no response: 37% (*n* = 15) compared with 15% (*n* = 18) that receive no response when the question does select a next speaker. It is also the case that even when a next speaker is selected these selected next speakers respond less often than in other languages. Out of 126 questions that do select a next speaker 19% (*n* = 24) are not answered by the selected next speaker.

Fifty-two responses are accompanied by visible components. Half of these, 50% (*n* = 26), are deictic gestures: mostly manual points and one head point. Twelve responses, 23%, are accompanied by iconic gestures: in this case gestures that illustrate the activity the speaker is talking about. For example, a gesture illustrating putting food into one's mouth accompanies a response about eating. Seven responses, 13%, are accompanied by confirming and disconfirming head nods and head shakes. Six responses consist solely of a visible component without an accompanying verbal utterance. Four of these are answers in the form of deictic gestures: three manual points and one lip point. Another of the six is an answer response in the form of a confirming head nod accompanied by an eyebrow flash. The last response is a non-answer response: a surprise showing gesture in which the answerer puts her hand in front of her mouth.

The responses to polar questions are interesting because polar questions can be answered in †Ākhoe by a 'yes' or 'no' as well as by a repetition of part of the question that usually does not include either 'yes' or 'no'. Both types of answers are equally frequent. In my data, of the 70 functional polar questions that are answered, 41.4% (*n* = 29) have yes/no answers; 41.4% (*n* = 29) have repetitions and less than 3% (*n* = 2) have both: a yes or no and a repetition. The remaining 14.2% (*n* = 10) of questions are answered differently, for example by disconfirming through correcting the question's underlying assumption:

- (30) Ma: †Abel-s-i-a?
NAME-3sf-UNKN-A
'by †Abel?'
AR: Thoma-b-i-a.
NAME-3sm-UNKN-A
'by Thomas' (H002235a) (Ga_beads2)

Some are questions that have the form of a polar question but are actually asking for more than just a yes or no. This is the case with the questions that have the topic-only question marker (section 3.2.2) and the question can be interpreted as "and what about X".

- (31) Ga: o †gū-s-a kha?
CONJ parent-3sf-A Q
'and (what about) her mother?'
Pt: hā-s ge nē †nôa i ge
come-3sf PST DEM sit STAT DECL
'she came, there she is sitting' (H005028) (Collect_nuts)

A number of responses also answer the question without explicitly giving a yes or no but by implying it.

- (32) Ms: *llari go sī ra ū-he dara-n ge h̄na?*
 one.day.from.now RECPST take.away PROG take-PAS wire-3pn DECL TAG
 ‘the wire was taken yesterday right?’
 KO: *ti-b goro mī i ge*
 thus-3sm RECPST say UNKN DECL
 ‘he said so’ (H007013) (Handcraft_3)

The bare yes and no answers occur in longer and shorter forms. The “full” yes is ‘*h̄*’ and the shorter forms range from ‘*h̄*’ and ‘*ī*’ to just a nasal ‘*m*’. There is also the ‘*ah*’ version of yes. For the no answers, I have only two examples in my data collection, neither of which is the “full” no ‘*h̄â â*’ or ‘*h̄î î*’. In this data collection, there is a nasal no: /hm̄m/ and there is the interjection ‘*ai ye*’ which is a marked no. There are not enough negative propositions in the data sample to be able to tell whether there is a connection between the form of the interjections and the valency of the propositions.

Both the interjections and the repeats can be used to answer a polar question. 80% ($n = 57$) of the functional polar questions receive a confirming answer and only 17% ($n = 12$) receive a disconfirming answer. As would be expected it is less common to disconfirm a polar question in the first place since this goes against a preference for confirmation in conversation (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984).

In addition to confirming a question, a repeat can also be used to upgrade the speaker’s authority on the matter being discussed. Speakers not only confirm or disconfirm but also upgrade: ‘indeed’, ‘my thoughts exactly’, and/or claim authority (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). In the following example Ga, the mother of Su, asks Su whether Su’s baby is vomiting. Su could have answered merely with a confirming ‘yes’ or even ‘he is vomiting’ but instead she upgrades her answer and replies that her baby is not only vomiting, he is vomiting a lot.

- (33) Ga: *llh̄i i b-a?*
 vomit STAT 3sm-A
 ‘is he vomiting?’
 Su: *llh̄i gara b-a i ge*
 vomit big 3sm-A STAT DECL
 ‘he is vomiting a lot’ (H003054) (Gas_yardA)

5. Interactional function of question types

Questions are clearly not only about form; they also have interactional functions. The five major interactional functions, they are called actions in Conversation Analysis, that were coded for in this project are 1. information requests, 2. repair initiators, 3. requests for confirmation, 4. assessments, and 5. suggestions, offers and requests. Information requests are what are often considered “real” questions. Their primary goal is to obtain information. Repair initiators are questions that aim to clarify a misunderstanding (Schegloff et al., 1977), for example: “You’re going where?”, this also includes open class repair initiators like “Huh?” and “What?” (Drew, 1997). Requests for confirmation are questions that do not aim to obtain confirmation of something that was misheard or misunderstood, but rather seek confirmation to a previously held assumption, for example “So you’re coming tonight?” Assessments that are done as information questions seek agreement (Pomerantz, 1984), for example: “Isn’t it beautiful out today?” The last group consists of a collection of less similar actions: suggestions, offers and requests (see Curl, 2006; Curl and Drew, 2008). For a more extensive description of the actions, see Stivers and Enfield, this volume.

The major action types for polar and content questions are information request and repair initiators. 62% ($n = 51$) of polar questions in the conversational data are used to do information requests and 24% ($n = 20$) are repair initiators. Content questions are used marginally more for repair initiators: 38% ($n = 39$). Information requests are 56% ($n = 58$). For the total distribution of the action types for polar and content questions see Table 4. The only alternative questions in my data sample occur in the experimental data and were not included in the action analysis.

In the natural data, I have coded seven questions as out-louds. These are utterances that are seemingly “said to oneself” (Levinson, 1988). They are comparable to utterances that in Australian Aboriginal studies are called broadcast talk (Walsh, 1991). These questions do not seem to be specifically designed to pressure anyone for an answer, i.e. no next speaker is selected, and often these questions indeed do not receive a response. Only two of the seven cases in this collection are answered and four receive no response at all.

Returning to the distribution of question types, †Ākhoe Hai||om has a markedly different distribution from the other languages.⁷ Where †Ākhoe has a majority of content questions, the other languages all have a majority of polar questions.

⁷ To make the sample of languages more representative from the perspective of †Ākhoe and less weighted in favour of European languages and cultures, which might make †Ākhoe look more different than it actually is, the European languages Danish, Dutch, English and Italian were combined into one “Indo-European” language to represent them all.

Table 4
Distribution of action type by question type.

Actions	Polar questions		Content questions	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Information request	62	51	56	58
Repair initiator	24	20	38	39
Confirmation request	2	2	–	–
Assessment	7	6	3	3
Suggestions/offer/request	4	3	4	4
Total	100	82	100	104

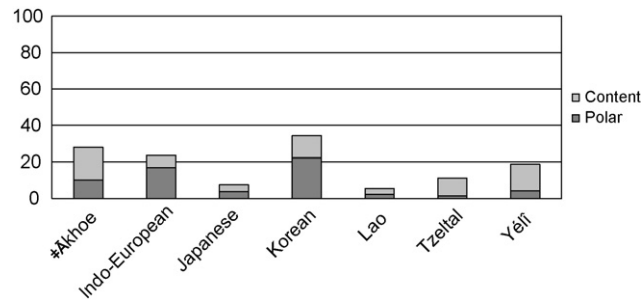


Fig. 2. Percentage of all questions that are repair initiators.

#Akhoe has 58.5% ($n = 134$) content questions and 41.5% ($n = 95$) polar questions. This is the opposite distribution to that of the other languages leading us to wonder what might account for this. This different distribution can be explained by looking at the actions that the questions are doing. In the field of Social Interaction it has been found that the grammatical structure of an utterance is often linked to the interactional function of the utterance (Curl and Drew, 2008; Schegloff, 2006). If #Akhoe speakers do different actions with their questions than speakers of other languages do, or perform certain actions more or less frequently than speakers of the other languages, this will affect the distribution of the question types. The actions that explain the different distribution are the repair initiators and the requests for confirmation. It is in these actions that #Akhoe speakers' behaviour differs from that of speakers of the other languages.

As shown in Fig. 2, #Akhoe speakers ask more repair initiating questions than speakers of most of the other languages, except Korean. Additionally most of the repair initiation is done using content questions. This boosts the overall number of content questions for #Akhoe.

Even more striking is that, as can be seen in Fig. 3, #Akhoe speakers virtually never request confirmation, while in the other languages requests for confirmation make up between 20% and 50% of all questions. Since requests for confirmation are always done using polar questions, not doing any requests for confirmation, as is the case here in #Akhoe, dramatically reduces the overall number of polar questions.

I conclude that action is indeed linked to question type and that the type of action performed by the speakers influences the distribution of question types. More repair initiators lead to more content questions and fewer requests for confirmation lead to fewer polar questions. However, this leaves a further puzzle—why do #Akhoe speakers initiate repair more often using content questions and make fewer confirmation requests? I address this in the next section.

6. Hunter-gatherer interaction: less coercive

I propose that the social culture of #Akhoe speakers leads them to pose questions in a way that is less coercive and less restrictive of the answerer than speakers of other languages do. In support of this, consider first #Akhoe speakers frequent reliance on open questions, i.e. content questions, which provide the answerer with greater “freedom” in choosing a type of answer than a closed question, i.e. polar questions, would provide. Polar questions constrain the recipient to ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers. Second, speakers are less likely to use requests for confirmation, which are highly coercive types of polar question biased towards a yes answer. I suggest that these preferences are shaped by the culture of #Akhoe speakers.⁸ As I will show in the rest of this chapter, this is supported by claims from hunter-gatherer studies. It is claimed for certain societies that lead

⁸ There are several languages in Africa, e.g. Swahili, Kera in Chad, and Gciriku in Namibia where posing questions is considered impolite, and that certain question types, such as polar questions, are dispreferred. In Kavango Kxoe, spoken in Namibia, a special phrase can be added after a question if you really want someone to answer it (personal communication M. Mous, M. Pearce and W. Möhlig 26 August 2008). However, this has not been systematically researched in natural conversation.

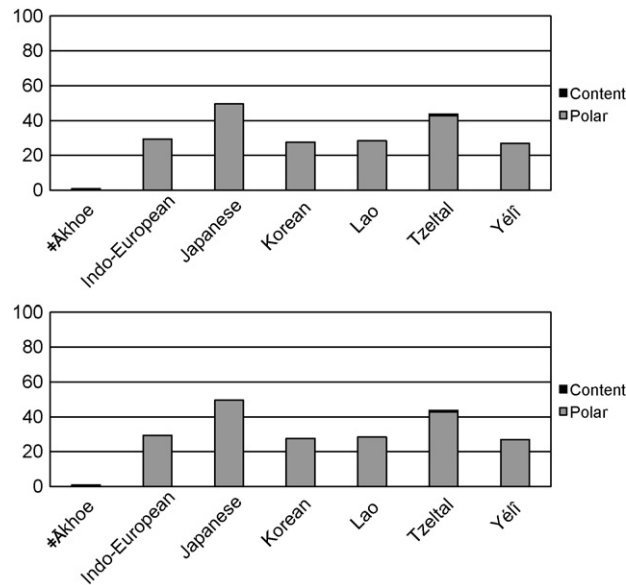


Fig. 3. Percentage of all questions that request confirmation.

an egalitarian,⁹ hunter-gatherer lifestyle that the conversational style differs from pastoralist societies due to the different social culture. The differences often lie in the acceptance of long silences, more overlap and less next speaker selection, which the researchers argue give the conversational partners more freedom, or in other words, are ways of being less coercive. These claims of different conversation styles are encountered most often for societies in Australia and southern Africa.

Such claims for the San¹⁰ come from the anthropologists Sugawara and Kitamura who looked at natural interaction of the !Gui and !Gana people in the Central Kalahari, Botswana. They observe more overlap and less uptake of turns than would be expected given comparisons with evidence from American English interaction (Kitamura, 1990; Sugawara, 1996, 1998). Sugawara proposes that the form of speaking is “deeply rooted in the form of life specific to hunting-gathering societies” (Sugawara, 1998:238). They both claim that a defining feature of San interaction is the speakers’ seeming indifference or lack of concern with the attention of their conversation partners but which is actually a mutual concern for individual independence.

Kimura (2001) has similar claims for the Baka pygmies of central Africa who also have a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Kimura shows that in Baka conversation both utterance overlap and long silences are more frequent than in Bakwélé (neighbouring farmers) and Japanese conversations. In his opinion the structure of the Baka conversations are formed by other tendencies observable in the rest of their lifestyles such as synchronization (also observable in their polyphonic singing and dancing).

Walsh (1991), Eades (1991, 1994) and Liberman (1985) report on the style of interaction amongst the Aboriginal people of Australia. Liberman and Eades report on the indirectness that is characteristic of Aboriginal interaction and which Eades summarises as a way of “giving other people interactional privacy [...] where there is frequently little physical privacy” (Eades, 1991:238). Walsh mentions the finding that there are relatively long periods of silence and that talk is frequently “broadcast” with no one explicitly addressed. He argues that this shows the greater control of listeners in interaction to take up talk (or not). This argument can be turned around in such a way that a tolerance for silence and lack of next speaker selection enables listeners to take up talk on their own terms or alternatively shows less coerciveness on the part of the speaker. Walsh points to two main factors in the Aboriginal way of life that lead to this, namely conversations being typically multiparty, and continuous. This comes forth out of the public nature of speakers’ lives.

Philips (1976, 2005) reports on the interactional style amongst the Indians of the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon, North America. Their conversations have fewer interruptions and a slower pace than English conversations, and there are longer silences. Speakers are said to have a greater tolerance for silence giving the respondent greater choice in whether to respond or not. Also, as in Aboriginal conversation, talk is often not explicitly addressed to anyone. This can again be interpreted as a lack of coerciveness on the part of the speaker.

Overall, the conversational styles of these societies contain more overlap (except for the American Indians) and longer periods of silence between turns and less next speaker selection. Some of these surface characteristics of conversations also occur in #Akhoe Hai||om. #Akhoe silences are relatively long compared to those of the other languages in the questions project, and #Akhoe speakers select a next speaker relatively less often than speakers of the other languages do. I will argue

⁹ In this case, egalitarianism is used to refer to societies that have no institutionalised social or political hierarchy, where individuals have equal access to resources and exchange functions along the lines of generalized reciprocity.

¹⁰ In southern Africa, hunter-gatherer societies are officially grouped together under the name San and the #Akhoe belong to this group.

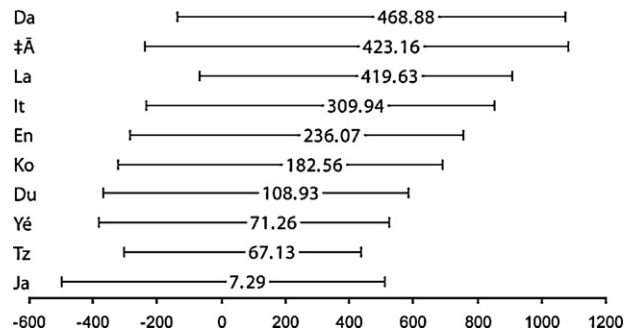


Fig. 4. Range of response times in ms by language (from Stivers et al., 2009).

that despite these differences, from a conversational structural point of view, Ṡākhoe Haillom is not radically different to other languages.

Some of the above mentioned researchers argue that the characteristics of longer silences and more overlap show that the turn-taking system as it is presented by Sacks et al. (1974) is not adequate. Turn-taking in everyday conversation is said to be based on the commonly observed rule that only one person speaks at a time. Thus, overlap is considered to be something to be avoided. If two speakers happen to speak at the same time, one or both of the speakers will stop. Silence is also considered to be something to be avoided. Yet, in the above-mentioned cultures there are styles of conversation in which the turn-taking rules do not apply yet these styles of conversation are in no way marked, they are not arguments or heated discussions (Sugawara, 1996, 1998). Kitamura (1990) and Sugawara both assert that the rules governing the taking of turns often seem not to apply in San languages: people speak simultaneously, overlap more than they “should” and turns are not taken up by the interlocutors when one would expect them to be, leading to prolonged turns by one speaker. Kimura (2001) claims that the Baka conversational features of overlapping speech and long silences actually contradict the universality claim of the turn-taking system as it is presented by Schegloff (2006).

However, in the data that was collected for the Questions Project there is no evidence to support an Ṡākhoe Haillom mode of communication that is radically unlike other cultural groups. The data does show differences but these can be explained. For question response sequences, the response time varies across the languages. As can be seen in Fig. 4, Japanese speakers were the fastest responders in the language sample and Ṡākhoe speakers along with the Danish speakers were the slowest responders.

Even though Ṡākhoe speakers respond slower, this does not have any effect on the structure of the turn taking of the speakers. The length of time that counts as a meaningful silence differs between the languages. Yet, the factors that predict how fast a speaker responds, relative to what in the speaker’s language is a meaningful silence, are the same across all the languages. Preferred answers, for example confirmations, are still produced faster than dispreferred answers, for example disconfirmations and non-answers (Stivers et al., 2009). In Ṡākhoe conversation there may be longer silences but these are not necessarily meaningful silences.

As for the more frequent overlap, I did not encounter this in my data. Fig. 5 shows the frequency of response offsets (y -axis) for a given time (x -axis) in Ṡākhoe. As can be seen the majority of responses do not come in overlap, as these responses would occur before 0 ms.

This is especially clear when Ṡākhoe is compared to Japanese (Fig. 6) where a lot more overlap occurs.

Once again, the speed of these responses, even though it differs between languages, does not have an influence on the structure of the turn taking (Stivers et al., 2009).

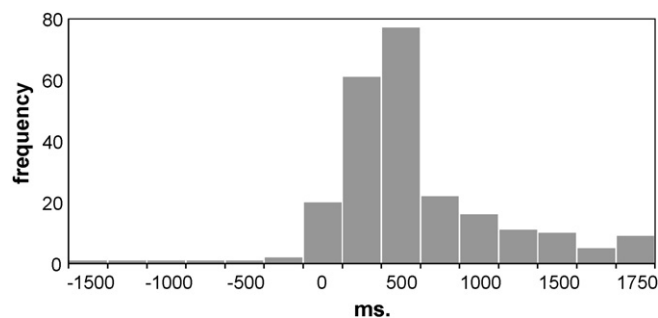


Fig. 5. Frequency of response offset in Ṡākhoe (each column representing instances in which offset between question and response falls within ‘bins’ of 250 ms).

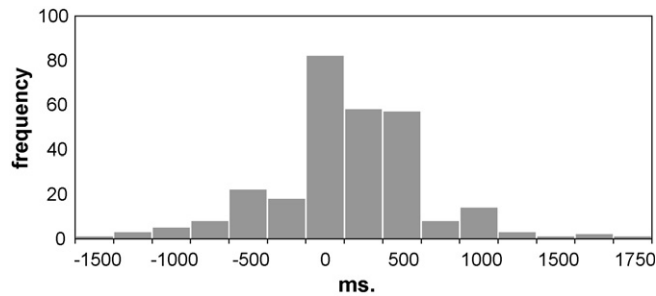


Fig. 6. Frequency of response offset in Japanese (each column representing instances in which offset between question and response falls within 'bins' of 250 ms).

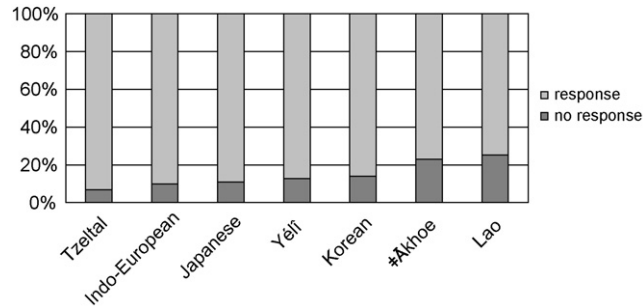


Fig. 7. The type of response in percentages for all questions.

One of the results to come out of the Questions Project that initially looked to fit well with the above mentioned anthropological evidence concerns the number of responses to questions as I have already mentioned in section 4. The anthropological evidence suggests that speakers show a greater concern for other speakers' independence, or a more general listeners control over uptake, resulting in a lack of turn uptake. The #Ákhoe data shows a high number of questions that get no response, no uptake. Looking only at the raw data, 23% of all questions never get a response in #Ákhoe. Together with Lao, that puts #Ákhoe at the highest end of the “no response” scale for the ten languages (see Fig. 7).

I want to argue that it is the structure of the question that influences the structure of the response. For instance, it might be driven by the low level of next speaker selection, which is also said to be low in Aboriginal languages and Indian languages of North America. Most questions are responded to and indeed most receive answers just as in other cultural groups. Although the rate of non-response appears slightly higher than in some other languages in this volume, it is still lower than Lao where 25% of questions receive no response.

I conclude that the data from the question response sequences for the #Ákhoe Haillom language does not contradict claims of universality of sequence structure, but rather it supports such claims. As Stivers et al. (2009) show, the timing of questions and responses across all the ten languages in the project, including #Ákhoe Haillom, support the turn taking system. There is no evidence for a larger amount of overlap or significantly longer silences. I also want to argue that the data shows that culture does have an influence on the utterance structural level. The seeming lack of responses in #Ákhoe can be explained by a cultural difference that causes speakers not to select a next speaker, which would have pressured for an answer. This behaviour might well be due to speakers' concerns for individual independence, as put forward by Sugawara and Kitamura. However, it is not the fact that the speakers are hunter-gatherers, or have an egalitarian lifestyle, that directly causes questions to remain unanswered, but the way in which these speakers pose the questions that makes it possible not to answer questions. The distribution of question types is similarly shaped by culture. A reluctance to pose direct questions, or questions that strongly pressure recipients to answer, leads to a higher proportion of content questions or open questions and almost no requests for confirmation, which are the most restrictive type of polar questions. Thus, for questions, the difference between “hunter-gatherer” and “non-hunter-gatherer” conversation is not on the level of the sequence of utterances but on the level of the function of the utterances. Therefore, the results are no contradiction to the universality of sequence structure. #Ákhoe Haillom is the only African language in the questions project, as well as being the only language whose speakers have a hunting-gathering lifestyle. Future work should investigate these distinctions to see whether they are upheld in other African languages, or other languages that fall into the hunter-gatherer group, once more detailed observation of natural turn-by-turn conversation is done.

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